



The Centre of Jewish Artists' Submission to the National Cultural Policy

COJA respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land that we live and work on, the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to elders past and present.

We recognise that First Peoples have engaged in storytelling and self-expression on this land through the arts for thousands of years and that these practices are continuing and evolving today. We honour the continuing presence of our country's First Peoples, and their enduring connection to Country, culture, language and community.

COJA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy and looks forward to working together towards a more inclusive arts and culture sector.

This was and always will be Aboriginal land.

The Centre of Jewish Artists (COJA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process for the next National Cultural Policy to shape the future of Australia's creative and cultural sector.

COJA is the peak body for Jewish artists and arts workers in Australia. Our mission is to support and advocate for Jewish artists across all artforms, and career stages, to pursue and maintain culturally, mentally and financially sustainable artistic careers.

COJA brings expertise in the Australian arts and culture sector, arts governance, and lived experience as Jewish independent artists and arts workers. COJA supports and represents a diverse range of Jewish artists and arts workers, arts board members, arts philanthropists and audience members.

We make this submission to highlight gaps within the sector in order to support a vibrant and sustainable cultural future.

In this submission we will address the following three key pillars;

A Place For Every Story

Centrality of the Artist

Strong Cultural Infrastructure.

Pillar 2. A Place For Every Story

A Place For Every Story requires the conditions for every artist to participate safely and fully in cultural life.

COJA welcomes the National Cultural Policy's commitment to **A Place For Every Story**. For this commitment to become a part of the fabric of our sector, every artist must be able to participate in and contribute to cultural life. For COJA, cultural safety is one of the core conditions that allows all artists to do this.

In order for every story to be considered and represented, artists need to be able to enter their creative workplaces including: festivals, rehearsal rooms, galleries, training environments and public programs, without feeling the need to filter, censor or hide parts of their identity in order to maintain an artistic career. Many artists rely on institutions, funding bodies, and public platforms to sustain their practice. When those environments are not culturally safe, the harm is not only personal, it affects careers, participation and representation. Ultimately it limits the stories that are able to be told in Australian cultural life.

Pillar 3. Centrality of the Artist

Centring the artist means recognising artists as workers whose safety, wellbeing, and reputation directly affect their ability to sustain their careers.

Since October 2023, COJA has supported Jewish artists and arts workers through a period of significant instability. Artists have reported experiences of antisemitism, cultural unsafety, professional exclusion, online targeting, and increased concern for their physical safety and wellbeing. COJA has seen these experiences affect artists in tangible ways: reporting loss of work, online hate campaigns, feeling isolated and excluded from professional networks, industry opportunities and events.

These experiences are situated in a sector where artists are already vulnerable. Artists are often working as contractors, project to project, with limited financial security and a reliance on personal reputation to attract and sustain work. In this context, experiencing cultural unsafety can change whether an artist applies for opportunities, attends industry events, maintains collaborations and visibility within the sector, publicly identifies as Jewish, or remains working in the creative and cultural industries at all. In centring artists' experiences, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges impacting Jewish artists' ability to practice and engage in their careers.

Pillar 4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Strong cultural infrastructure includes the organisations, knowledge, and systems that allow artists to remain connected to the sector.

Cultural infrastructure isn't just buildings, institutions, funding rounds, and formal programs. It includes the organisations, knowledge, and systems that help artists sustain their participation in the sector. This includes culturally informed support, trusted community-led organisations, safe and respectful workplaces, clear complaint/reporting pathways, and institutions that know how to respond when cultural harm occurs.

This work cannot be left to artists to navigate alone. When an artist has a culturally unsafe experience, they are often asked to make difficult decisions inside a sector where future work is scarce and can depend on personal reputation. Speaking up can carry professional risk, while staying silent can carry personal risk. This is why cultural safety needs to be understood as infrastructure. Community-led organisations like COJA help artists navigate difficult situations. But cultural safety becomes sustainable when our institutions, funding bodies, and leaders are empowered to embed it in their work.

The Office for the Arts, Creative Australia and Creative Workplaces all have important roles to play in this work. COJA would welcome further support for Creative Australia and Creatives Workplaces to work with COJA and other community-led organisations on designing and delivering plans that strengthen the cultural safety of Australia's arts institutions.

COJA also encourages stronger connection between the Office for the Arts and the Office for Social Cohesion. Arts and culture have a meaningful role to play in building trust, belonging and connection across communities. Social cohesion cannot only be treated as a crisis response, it can be built through everyday cultural participation, artistic exchange, shared public life and community-led creative practice.

For COJA, this commitment to cultural safety is what is required to centre artists in Australia's cultural landscape. Artists of all backgrounds must be able to work safely in our sector, because the stories we hold space for are the stories that come to define how we understand our country.

Our Recommendations:

COJA advocates from our lived experience as Jewish artists and arts workers, and from our work supporting Jewish artists across Australia. We are committed to an arts and culture sector that is inclusive for all artists, particularly those from marginalised communities. Through this lens, COJA offers the following recommendations:

1. Recognise cultural safety as a core condition of cultural participation. Artists and arts workers need safe and respectful environments in order to participate fully in Australian cultural life.
2. Recognise community-led arts organisations as essential cultural infrastructure. Organisations like COJA provide support, cultural knowledge, advocacy, and care that cannot be provided by mainstream institutions alone. Individual artists should not be expected to carry the cultural load themselves.
3. Resource Creative Australia and Creative Workplaces to work with COJA and other organisations on practical cultural safety action plans that are embedded within organisational practices.
4. Strengthen collaboration between the Office for the Arts and the Office for Social Cohesion. Arts and culture should be recognised as tools for building belonging and connection across communities.
5. Embed safe and respectful workplace expectations across publicly funded arts activity. Funding agreements, grant guidelines and reporting processes should support clear standards for cultural safety, respectful conduct and accountability.

Conclusion

COJA envisions a future where Jewish artists are supported and empowered to meaningfully contribute to contemporary Australian discourse. By embracing and celebrating the diversity of Jewish and intersectional identities, we aim to inspire future generations of creativity rooted in authenticity and pride. COJA believes this future should be possible for all marginalised communities, and that every artist should be able to contribute to Australian cultural life safely and meaningfully.

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to deepen the impact of Australia's arts and culture sector by moving principles into practice. The arts sector plays an important role in social cohesion and democratic participation, and the new National Cultural Policy should recognise the practical role that artists, organisations, and cultural institutions can play in building trust, belonging and connection across communities.

COJA is committed to continuing to work with stakeholders across the arts and culture sector to support Jewish artists, strengthen cultural safety, and contribute to a more inclusive cultural life in Australia. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further cultural consultation in relation to this submission and COJA's broader work in the arts sector.